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***PRAIRIE INTERLACE: WEAVING, MODERNISMS, AND THE EXPANDED FRAME, 1960–2000,*
MICHELE HARDY, TIMOTHY LONG AND JULIA KRUEGER (EDS) (2023)**

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Prairie Interlace: Weaving, Modernisms, and the Expanded Frame, 1960–2000 explores innovative textile-based art on the Canadian Prairies (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba provinces) in the second half of the twentieth century, focusing on weaving and other interlace practices, such as rug hooking, macrame, knitting and crochet. It examines how weaving, traditionally seen as a craft, intersected with and contributed to modernist art practices, thus challenging the boundaries between art and craft. *Prairie Interlace* also reflects on the factors causing the rise and fall of the textile movement during the time. The book follows the exhibition *Prairie Interlace* that took place from December 2022 to February 2024 in four different locations across the Canada Prairies, including Nickle Galleries in Calgary, Alberta; Mann Art Gallery in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba in Brandon, Manitoba; and MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan. The book and accompanying exhibition contribute to the positioning of the regional craft histories in the national and international contexts in the period of the transitioning from modernism to postmodernism and the emergence of fibre art education in the region, such as Alberta College of Art (now AUArts).

Three thematic sections

The editors who were also the curators of the exhibition curated and organized a collection of eleven essays into three sections, which illuminate the multifaceted nature of textile art on the Canadian Prairies, highlighting both historical overview and individual artistic achievements when the artists navigated and excelled the limitations imposed by traditional categorizations of their work.

Consisting of six essays, the first section entitled 'Recovering Histories' delves into the often-overlooked histories of weaving and other related fibre art in the region, not only during the second half of the twentieth century but also during a period prior that influenced textile art forms in the period after. This section emphasizes unique contributions to the field during this time by the artists with diverse backgrounds, including settlers, immigrants and Indigenous people. The essays in this section uncover and document the lost histories, examining the contexts in which the textile works were produced, the influences behind them, and their significance within the broader scope of Canadian art history.

The second section 'Contextual Encounters' comprising four essays examines the interactions and dialogues between various artistic practices and cultural contexts that shaped textile art in the Prairies. The section covers topics such as the curation of the *Prairie Interlace* exhibition, the cultural and social encounters that influenced fibre art, and the roles of contextual bodies from everyday life to political activism. It provides a nuanced understanding of how Prairie textile artists navigated and contributed to both local and global art discourses and highlights the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation of the textile art scene in the region.

The last and shortest section of the book, 'Expanding the Frame' does as its title suggests. It demonstrates through one and only essay in the section how artists associated with the *Prairie Interlace* exhibition and their practices conceptually and geographically extend beyond traditional boundaries.

Section 1: Recovering Histories

Section 1 opens with the essay 'Stand back – nothing to see – move along' by Jennifer Salahub. Delving into the often-neglected history of craft and craft education, the essay reveals how early weaving initiatives during the 1940s traversed broader cultural, social and artistic movements on the Canada Prairies and set the stage for the flare-up of innovative textile-based art in the latter half of the twentieth century. Salahub recovered and, at the same time, documented 'lost modernisms' related to craft processes and objects of the mid-century Prairie weaving initiatives, stating that 'the fibre art movement was a child of modern art and an active player in Modernism's grand narrative' (18). Weaving was thus found its place within the modernist discourse. As the essay reveals, modernity played a role in the critical acceptance and success of the fibre art in the 1960s

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and 1970s, regardless of the ongoing prejudices related to gender and media that marginalized fibre art.

Contributions of Indigenous and co-operative textile artists to the broader narrative of modernist art in Canada are brought to light in the next essay 'Marginalized moderns: Co-operatives and indigenous textile arts in Saskatchewan, 1960–1972'. The author, Sherry Farrell Racette, illuminated how co-operatives and Indigenous artists utilized textile art as a means of cultural expression and economic sustainability. After a long period of suppression of Indigenous culture and artistic expression that had lasted until 1951 and resulted in the loss of traditional knowledge, both the federal and provincial governments attempted to revive First Nations arts and culture. While the Department of Indian Affairs established its Cultural Affairs section in 1965 to develop exhibitions and projects related to First Nations arts and culture, Saskatchewan's Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) government engaged in developing co-operatives as alternatives to the trading post system, e.g., in 1960 the Northern Handicraft Co-operative Centre at La Ronge was established in 1960 through which products such as rugs made with ancient northern Cree techniques in designs appealing to tourists were marketed. Viewing Indigenous creativity as untouched resources, the federal government committed to Indigenous co-operatives, but their vision of Indigenous arts was restricted to promoting First Nations men as professional artists while women produced craft for a low-end tourist market. The essay moves on to discuss the Sioux Handicraft Co-operative at Standing Buffalo whose people were descendants of major bands of the Sisseton Dakota and Teton Lakota that had moved to the norths in the 1860s. Most of the women were related; they worked together in the Co-operative to create latch-hooked rugs called *Ta-hah-sheena*, after a type of Dakota ornamented robe. Designs of these rugs were based on those found on the robes and painted parfleche containers and applied the visual grammar that was rooted in the basic shapes including lines, triangles and squares, each of which is like an alphabet that when combined can create deep meanings. 'Interpretation rested at the intersection of the viewer's knowledge, the maker's imagination, and the function of the object' (45). The essay provides an in-depth historical context, illustrating collaborative and community-focused nature of textile arts in this region and how the artists navigated the sociopolitical landscape of the time to create works that were both innovative and deeply rooted in their cultural heritage.

In 'Métis stories and women's artistic labour in Margaret Pelletier Harrison's *Margaret's Rug*', Métis scholar Cheryl Troupe scrutinized the intricate connection between Métis cultural heritage and women's artistic labour by focusing on a specific textile artefact *Margaret's Rug* created by Margaret Pelletier Harrison (Figure 1). The cultural and personal significance of the rug was thoroughly analysed through a multidisciplinary approach that integrated oral history, community engagement and historical research. This methodology allows Troupe to view the rug as not only an artistic object but also a repository of stories, traditions and the resilience of Métis women. The essay emphasizes the role of Métis women in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge through textile

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art practices which were a form of resistance against cultural elimination and a means of maintaining community connections. It contributes to the understanding of Métis artistic practices and the broader narrative of textile arts in Canada as well as the ways in which Métis women's labour has shaped and enriched the cultural landscape of the Canada Prairies.

Mary-Beth Lavolette's essay 'The gift of time, the gift of freedom: Weaving and fibre art at the Banff Centre' delved more deeply into how institutional support was the catalyst for artistic innovation of textile arts and professional development of textile artists in Canada by shedding light on the legacy of the Banff Centre. With its support through residencies, workshops and courses, the Banff



Figure 1: Margaret Harrison, Margaret's Rug, c.2005, 55.8cm × 99.1cm, hooked rug, recycled wool sweaters, T-shirts, silk on burlap.

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Centre became a hub for textile artists to engage with new techniques, materials and ideas, offering them time and space to focus on experimenting and refining their craft, which was crucial for the growth and evolution of textile art during this period. These opportunities significantly nurtured a generation of artists whose contributions significantly advanced the field of textile art on the Canadian Prairies and beyond. Lavolette also highlighted the influence of prominent instructors and artists associated with the Banff Centre, such as Mary Garnham Andrew, Mary E. Snyder and Mariette Rousseau-Vermette, who played crucial roles in shaping the Centre's approach to weaving fibre arts. The essay examines specific works and the artistic journeys of a number of artists who benefited from the Centre's programmes, demonstrating the transformative impact that the Banff Centre had on their practices, enabling them to push boundaries and explore new possibilities in weaving and fibre arts. Lavolette's analysis is contextualized within the broader themes of the book, which addresses the intersection of modernism and regionalism in Canadian fibre arts.

The last essay in the first section of the book, 'Living and liveable spaces: Prairie textiles and architecture' by Susan Surette, shifts the focus to the integration of Prairie textiles into architectural spaces. Surette examined the historical context of textile use in architecture, emphasizing the ways in which the unique qualities of textiles, such as their flexibility, texture and colour, contributed to the creation of spaces that were both comfortable and expressive of the Prairie landscape and culture. With their properties, textiles can enhance the sensory experience of spaces and provided warmth, acoustic buffering and visual dynamic. Instrumental in commissioning is the Canada's Public Works Fine Art Program (1964–78) that allocated one per cent of the cost of a federal building project towards the purchase of art for that building. Prairie weavers were eager to take commission work to encourage 'living and liveable spaces' with the design, materials and construction of their monumental textiles (87). The sizes, shapes and configurations of the walls were considered. The essay discusses specific examples where textiles were employed to enhance architectural interiors, how they reflect broader modernist movements in art and architecture and situate Prairie textile art in a global context while also acknowledging its unique regional characteristics. However, the lifespan of an architectural textile work could vary greatly, depending on the building in which the work was situated – when the building was renovated, or the interior was updated, the textile work was unfortunately decommissioned and detached from the space it was once created for.

Section 2: Contextual Encounters

The first essay of Section 2, 'Curating Prairie interlace: Encounters, longings, and challenges' by Julia Krueger and Michele Hardy, discusses the process of curating textiles and challenges involved in the organization of the *Prairie Interlace* exhibition. Being two of the three curators of the exhibition, Krueger and Hardy revealed the research phase of the curation that was disrupted by the

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COVID-19 pandemic when visiting archives and collections to view textiles in person was not possible. As a result, the selection of artworks for the exhibition was carried out remotely through online databases and files. The authors admitted that they had not fully understood some of the selected works until when they were unpacked for the first exhibition in 2022 at Nickle Galleries. In addition to this, the essay also reflects on the complexities of representing diverse artistic practices and the historical context of Prairie textile art. The authors openly pinpointed practical difficulties that the curators faced in curating the exhibition in addition to the research and selection, including not only the transportation and display of intricate textile pieces, but also the designing of an engaging and informative exhibition. For example, architectural textiles were specifically created in certain dimensions to fit the space and might not be possible to be installed in its entirety anywhere else, or textile objects were not collected as much as other forms of fine craft due to the costs of conservation and the lack of staff expertise, among many others. Moreover, when they were conserved in a museum archive, they were not visible as they were kept in a secure, dark, environmentally controlled storage. The essay provides insights into the meticulous planning and problem-solving required to bring the *Prairie Interlace* exhibition to fruition.

In the next essay, 'Weaving at the horizon: Encounters with fibre art on the Canadian Prairie', Mackenzie Kelly-Frère examined the evolution and impact of fibre art in the Canada Prairie and its unique contributions to both the local and broader art worlds from his lived experience. Kelly-Frère is a descendant of settlers on Treaty Seven Territory (south of Alberta) and was a textile art student in the 1990s at the Alberta College of Art (now AUArts) under several textile artists, such as Katharine Dickerson and Jane Kidd, whose works were included in the *Prairie Interlace* exhibition. Kelly-Frère expressed the influences he received during his study from these artists and at the same time provided a brief history of the development of educational programmes for weaving instruction on the Canadian Prairies and the ways in which the Prairies artists, while active in creating their work as artists, contributed to the field as educators. He reflected on the role of the Prairie landscape in inspiring and influencing artists in the region; the vast, open spaces and unique environmental conditions were recognizable in the work by Prairie artists. In addition, another influence on weaving across the Prairies in the author's view is that some artists who immigrated from Ukraine, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland to Canada brought with them textile traditions from their home countries and contributed to the innovative fibre art in the region.

Mireille Perron's essay 'Contextual bodies: From the cradle to the barricade' examines the personal and political dimensions of textile art. The essay provides a nuanced exploration of how Prairie textile arts in the latter half of the twentieth century incorporated the themes of identity, feminism and social context. It discusses the evolution of textile practices from domestic crafts to powerful mediums of artistic and political expression. Perron took certain artists' works in *Prairie Interlace* (such as Phyllis Green and Maija Peeples-Bright) and delved into the ways in which these artists used fibre

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art as a tool to articulate personal and collective identities, especially for women and marginalized communities. The essay analyses the historical and cultural contexts that had influenced these artists' practices, underlining how textile arts moved from the private home domain ('the cradle') to the public and activist ones ('the barricade'). In Perron's view, these artists

took up modernist key gestures such as truth to materials and abstraction, and intertwined activist, affective, poetic, and aesthetic purposes to suggest how textiles can be used to advance a political agenda as well as to make material engagement synonymous with community participation. [...] These textile works invented new interpretative devices to foretell other ways to tell stories, lives, subjectivities, and bodies from the cradle to the barricade.

(161)

To close Section 2, 'Six ways of looking at Prairie interlace' by Alison Calder further highlights the contributions of Indigenous and immigrating artists and how their work has been integral to the development of the fibre art moment in the Canada Prairie and to the *Prairie Interlace* exhibition. Textile works intersecting with the themes of identity, feminism and social context exemplified in the Perron's essay are also examined in this chapter to emphasize that these works are not just artistic expressions but embodiments of cultural narratives, feminist ideals and regional identities. The essay also illuminates that there is more than one uniformed way to look at the Prairie landscape for inspiration, demonstrating how the *Prairie Interlace* exhibition challenged the way in which the Prairie landscape is appreciated through the creative practices of textile artists by featuring works that explored the landscape from a multitude of distinct perspectives. Textile works in the exhibition that were inspired by the Prairie landscape go beyond depicting a specific place to revealing 'the land's deep history as layers of human occupation' (166) and the artist's labour involved in making the works.

Section 3: Expanding the Frame

The only essay included in this section is 'Weaving in an expanded frame' by Timothy Long. This essay begins with the following statement: 'Framing as a physical device is an unnecessary addition [to weaving and other interlace practices]' but

whenever weaving is shown in an art gallery or museum, the frame of art is there, in the architecture, the institution, the conventions of display and ways of appropriating images that go back to the origins of modernity. A frame is unavoidable if we are to call a weaving a work of art.

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While this statement sheds light on the struggle that fibre art faced in the modernist time, Long pointed out that the works featured in the *Prairie Interlace* exhibition affirmed that they were independent from the frame of fine art. Weavers and fibre artists working with other interlacing techniques during the second half of the twentieth century pushed the boundaries of their medium, incorporating new materials as well as technical and conceptual approaches. In this period, there was a shift from decorative or utilitarian textiles to works that engage with more contemporary artistic contexts.

In conclusion, *Prairie Interlace* offers an in-depth examination of the intersection between weaving and modernist art practices in the Canadian Prairie provinces over four decades. This comprehensive volume is an essential read for anyone interested in the rich history of textile art, its evolution and cultural significance in the broader context of modernist movements. It brings to light the significant yet often overlooked contributions of artists in this region, showcasing how they merged traditional craft with modernist art movements to create new and dynamic textile works. As a practising textile artist and a newcomer to Canada myself, the book has broadened and deepened my understanding of textile art in the west of the country of which I had limited knowledge, prior to reading it. Moreover, this 248-page book is richly illustrated with 180 colour photographs of the artworks, visually complementary to the textual analysis. Such visual documentation helped me as a reader appreciate the aesthetic qualities and technical craftsmanship of the works discussed. I believe that all readers will feel the same.

Contributor details

Dr Nithikul Nimkulrat intertwines research with textile practice, focusing on experiential knowledge in craft processes in the context of design research. Nithikul is full professor at OCAD University in Canada where she was the acting chair of the Material Art& Design programme in 2020–23. She is the recipient of the 2022/2023 OCAD University Award for Distinguished Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity. Her new book is *Craft and Design Practice from an Embodied Perspective*, published by Routledge in July 2024.

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